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# The Presbyterian



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PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 1, 1905



# The Presbyterian

VOLUME 75

PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 1, 1905

NUMBER 9

## The Mission of the Modern Church.

The modern Church, or twentieth century Church, is supposed to have a mission peculiarly its own. Much is said about what she is to be, according to the varying standards of the horoscopists. Work is marked out for her on an extensive scale, and in different ways, and with re-adjusting organic and doctrinal principles. But after all is said and done, what her Head requires of her to-day is essentially what he imposed upon the primitive Church, and what he has commanded his Church in all ages to do. There has been no cancellation of his original and perpetuative mandate: "Go ye into all the world and preach my Gospel to every creature." Her duty is to "disciple all nations." Christianity is one and the same in all climes and under all circumstances. It has in it the power to enlighten, to uplift, to reform, to evangelize, and to save. Its doctrines, principles and precepts lose nothing with the lapse of time, or the evolutions of individual and national life and experience. Eras come and go, but the Gospel demands expression and exemplification with the advancing periods. Not until millennial times will the earth witness its fullest and most glorious developments. Not until the recording angel declares, "Time is no more," will it cease as a moulding, dominating, reformatory and transforming factor in all that concerns human affairs socially, morally, spiritually and eternally.

It is as necessary now to call men to repentance as it was when John the Baptist and our blessed Lord went forth with the summons, "Repent." Human nature has not changed, and needs a spiritual renovation. The life without a drawing and saving Christ and a sanctifying Spirit has made no more advance toward moral perfection than when Paul exposed its defects before God in Rome and in Greece. Man may boast of a better exterior, but he needs a radical transformation as much as ever. Talk as we may about the progress of the age in all directions, mankind on every side shows much of the corruption, carnality and enmity to God which grace alone can remove. Many are disposed to exalt science and philosophy as the great solvents of life's problems, but these are limited in their spheres of operation and can never take the place of the religion of Jesus Christ for fully meeting the deeper and more important phases of human existence. Howsoever viewed, the world is as much in need of instruction in sacred things, of the subjugation of the man's will to God's, of the development of character according to Christian ideals, of the conformation of the entire being to the Bible standard, of the possession of the graces of the Spirit and of the hope of immortality and perfection beyond the grave as at any period since the introduction of the New Testament dispensation.

The Church of the present day cannot afford to ignore the methods of operation, growth and propagation given us in Holy Writ. She may well go back to Christ and to his apostles for her doctrine and practice. She cannot improve upon them as teachers and propagandists. Their methods in general are of value and power wherever similar results are to be accomplished. There may be modifications to suit social and national relations, tastes and tendencies, but the great and main instrumentalities, prayer, faith, truth, a living and authoritative Christ, an illuminating, regenerating and sanctifying Spirit and a holy living, are of permanent force, adaptation and service under all varying circumstances and in all generations. The Bible, read, preached and exemplified, is as important and needful under our boastful civilization as it was during the periods when it wrought its greatest triumphs under the Reformers. Preaching and philanthropy are to be kept in the foreground if we are to produce the results produced by them in former days. Practical godliness must continue to hold an influential and masterful place as it did in the primitive Church, if we are to conquer the world for Christ. The sermon is not to go out of fashion, nor to give place to the liturgy, or to the choir. It must be simple, strong, direct, pointed, timely and practical to accomplish the end intended. The revival fire must burn and glow. The edifying power of the pulpit must not disappear. The spirit in church life must rise above form, and love to God and to man must be all-inspiring and quickening. A Christ doctrine and practice must assert their potentiality under all circumstances if the Church is to hold the place in the world's civilization, elevation and redemption that her ascended and enthroned Lord intended from the beginning.

As in the early Church, so in the modern, there is work for all. The laity has a call of God to labor for the advancement of his kingdom. There is a sphere for young and old, rich and poor, high and low, black and white, learned and unlearned, to occupy. Never were there louder, better and larger opportunities for doing something for human welfare and salvation. At home and abroad there is room for our prayers, our gifts and our activities. It is not enough to pay for one's pew rental, or to contribute to benevolent schemes. There should be the open eye, and responsive heart, and helping hand, in every enlarging field of service.

With a devoted, zealous, hopeful, and aggressive ministry and a wide-awake, consecrated and working laity, under the guidance of an inspired and authoritative Bible and a guiding, converting and reviving Spirit, the modern Church is equipped for her mission of enlightenment, purification and salvation, and ought to transmit to succeeding generations the sacred and

cuted, banished, often in jeopardy of his life, he yet died in his bed in a good old age. He tarried, according to the foretelling, until Christ's coming to destroy Jerusalem—it having pleased God to set him apart from the rest for the honored task of completing the canon of his revealed and written Word.

An unaccountable, if not unfair, discrimination seems, at first view, to be made here against Peter. His own later warning, indeed, implies how entirely natural it is for us to wonder at the "fiery trial" which even the best beloved of our brethren are sometimes appointed to endure. Of a certain friend, for example, I am tempted to say, "He is, so far as I can see, no more of a Christian than am I. Why, then, should God give to him so much better a time, so much more honored a position, than he gives to me?" Who can tell? Health and sickness, weakness and strength, toil and ease, poverty and wealth, lowliness and loftiness of rank, ten talents and two—these widely different gifts and experiences God does either ordain or permit. To some he gives all the abounding comforts of this life "and heaven besides." What concern of mine if he does? My course is plain. I have but to follow Christ—sure, if I do, that however hard and rough the way, it will lead to the same bright and happy heaven at last—brighter and happier, it may be, since the heavier the cross, if patiently borne, the richer will be the crown.

Give our blind, rebellious impatience its way and it would make a quick average of these so unequally distributed gifts, attainments, prosperities and adversities. Thus of one who has been long and signally prospered we are tempted to say: "Never mind; his turn will come, one of these days!" Perhaps not. His "turn," in that sense, may never come at all. It may please the Master to give him a smooth and pleasant path to the very end. "What is that" to me? Is there, then, such a superabundance of happiness in this world that I should enviously wish that there were less?

Two ambitious sons of an ambitious mother once asked Jesus for what they mistakenly imagined were the two highest honors in his gift. The answering rebuke and questioning test are as fitting now as they were then: "How poor and unworthy is your estimate of me and of my kingdom! Enough, if you can partake with me of this cup and of this my baptism, which speak not of any earthly glory but only of loving service and sacrifice for the relieving of the suffering, the comforting of the sorrowing, and the saving of the lost."

*Pittsfield, Mass.*

### The Basis of the Proposed Union—Theoretical and Practical.

By Professor B. B. Warfield, D.D., LL.D.

On what basis is it proposed that the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in the United States of America shall unite? On the basis, speaking briefly, of "the doctrinal and ecclesiastical standards" now in authority in the former of those two Churches. This is made sufficiently clear and distinct in the enactment of the Assembly; and it is very necessary to insist upon it with great strenuousness. Whatever else the Assembly may have said or done, this remains the sole

basis on which the union, if it is effected, shall have been effected. Every office-bearer in the united Church by becoming a party to the union, will have come under obligations to recognize "the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as revised in 1903," as his Confession of Faith, and the "other doctrinal and ecclesiastical standards" of that Church as his other "doctrinal and ecclesiastical" standards, which he professes so far as the doctrinal standards are concerned "to receive and adopt as containing the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scriptures," and so far as the ecclesiastical standards are concerned "to approve" and loyally to obey, studying the peace, unity and purity of the Church. This precise relation to the standards is defined in these standards themselves as the relation in which the office-bearers of the Church stand to its standards; and in accepting these standards as the basis of union this relation to the standards is accepted by every office-bearer that enters into the union. If he does not so understand the matter, then he enters into the union under an error which goes far to vitiate the whole act of incorporation and which certainly opens the way for much future misunderstanding and strife.

The importance of insisting upon these primary facts arises from the emergence in the course of discussion of many indications that the nature and effect of the basis of union are not always thoroughly borne in mind by either party to it; and that there is danger that the practical basis on which the two Churches unite, if they finally unite, may lie pretty far away from the theoretical basis on which the union is proposed to be constituted.

There are ominous appearances, for example, that what the Cumberland brethren are really offering and what our Church is preparing to satisfy itself with, is not a real and hearty reception and adoption of our standards, but a purely formal subscription to them. Hitherto we have never legally incorporated into the rights and responsibilities of office-bearing in the Church a single individual on the basis of a purely formal subscription to the standards. We are in grave danger of acquiescing now in the incorporation of several thousands at once. I am not saying it would be done even in these circumstances legally. I have serious doubts whether it is legal, or can be made legal to do so. It is certainly a debatable question whether, so long as constitutional provisions directed precisely to preventing the incorporation into the service of the Church of any officers on a purely formal subscription to the standards, stand unrepealed, they can be disregarded on a large, any more than on a small scale, without thereby acting in violation of constitutional pledges. But letting that pass for the moment, it can scarcely be denied that the procedure is in the highest degree revolutionary.

I doubt whether all of us have considered sufficiently closely the nature and effect of the procedure that is proposed to us, to realize in its full force what we are in danger of doing. Consider only one or two obvious things. Of whom are we accepting this purely formal subscription to our standards? Of men known from their former professions to be in their doctrinal beliefs in harmony with our standards? Or, of men

of whose doctrinal beliefs we are at least ignorant and so may presume them to be possibly in general harmony with our standards? Nothing less than this. Rather, of men of whom we cannot fail to know that up to the very moment of their formal acceptance of our standards they have been in *open and polemic disharmony with them*. Surely the merely formal subscription to our standards which it is proposed to accept carries with it in such circumstances no assurance whatever that those standards are interpreted in their natural and historical sense. Rather it would seem to be apparent on the face of things that they could not be subscribed by these signatories at all except in an unnatural and unhistorical sense. And this natural supposition is directly borne out by every utterance which has been made upon their part. We have only to read over the "Supplementary Report" offered by their Committee of Union to their Assembly and spread on their Assembly Minutes to perceive that the signature they offer to our standards is conditioned by a set of judgments, about those standards and about the meaning of acceptance of them, which vitiates the entire act.

And this is but half, and very much the lesser half, of the story. The other, and much the larger half, is that a very large number of those whom it is proposed to bring into the relation of signatories of our standards by this act of formal subscription, make no secret that they do not in the least accept them as the expression of their personal doctrinal faith. On the contrary they *expressly repudiate them* and passionately declare that they never can, and never will, accept them "as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures," and that they never will live peaceably under their authority. This is the openly proclaimed attitude of a minority of every Presbytery which votes in favor of union with our Church "on the basis of" our standards. It is the attitude of perhaps a majority of every Presbytery which votes against the union on that basis. It may be the attitude of the majority of office-bearers in the Cumberland Church; and in any event it is the attitude of a very considerable minority, aggregating in any case several thousands. The large Presbytery of Obion, for example, has given official expression to this attitude in a comparatively mild, but sufficiently startling, form, in a formally adopted document "saving its face" in the event of the consummation of the union. So that we are, incredible as it sounds, yet actually proposing to ourselves the remarkable procedure of incorporating into the body of office-bearers of the Church as united, serving as such professedly and formally on the basis of a hearty acceptance of our standards, thousands who are openly, and in many cases even violently, protesting against those standards.

Is it not incumbent upon us to look fairly and squarely in the face the remarkable result we are on the eve of actualizing? We are actually proposing to incorporate thousands of office-bearers into the service of the Church, not on the basis of their own subscription to the standards, but on the basis of somebody else's subscription to the standards. Certainly the *principle of vicarious subscription* is a new thing under the sun. I suppose that never before since the world began was it ever seriously proposed to accept the subscription of others in lieu of men's own, as determining their atti-

tude to articles of faith; especially in the face of vigorous protests from themselves that they do *not* adopt these standards. Is not the thing absurd on the face of it? Here are several hundreds of ministers and several thousands of elders who are to be incorporated into the body of office-bearers of a Church, one of whose constitutional requirements is that all its office-bearers shall heartily accept its standards as the truth of God in systematized form, on a basis of a subscription to those standards, which they themselves refuse to make, crying out that they cannot make it in good conscience:—for no other reason, and on no other ground, than that other people who happen slightly to outnumber them (if they do outnumber them), are willing to give a formal assent to these standards!

Surely the situation thus brought about, whatever may be the formal rights and wrongs of it, is practically intolerable. It is too little to ask whether such a procedure is constitutional—though assuredly it cannot be constitutional. If the incorporation of thousands of office-bearers under bonds to believe standards which they do not believe and protest they do not, and never can, believe, is not the stultification of a constitution which requires such belief as a condition of office-bearing, it is impossible to stultify constitutional requirements. It is too little to ask whether it is wise, though assuredly it reaches the acme of unwisdom. What is to be the status of these protesting office-bearers in the Church after the union is consummated? They *ipso facto* rest under the condemnation of the standards which they repudiate; and they can continue to hold the offices into the responsibilities and conditions of which they are thus unrighteously thrust against their own protest only by malfeasance in duty on the part of the courts to which they are amenable. Only on the principle that two crying wrongs can make a happy right could either they consent to remain one moment in the false position into which they have been betrayed, or the courts having jurisdiction consent that they should remain in it. The real question is, Whether such a union involving these protentous results of a purely formal subscription to standards, which on the part of multitudes of the signatories is openly a purely vicarious subscription against which they loudly protest, can in any true sense be said to be a union "on the basis of those standards." I do not see how the Cumberland Presbyterians can honorably offer such a subscription as, in the circumstances, alone they can as a Church offer. I do not see how we can honorably accept such a subscription as, in the circumstances, alone they are, as a Church, in a position to give. I do not see how a union consummated on the offering and receiving of such a subscription can be held to be in any true sense a union consummated on the basis on which the present union is proposed, the basis to wit, of our standards.

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There is the prayer of two hearts separated by distance, made at the same hour in the same words. Soothing prayer, that each day reunites those two sad hearts torn by the agony of parting, and who in God's presence, strengthened with the same Holy Spirit, recover courage to tread the road to heaven, each in its appointed sphere.